

For Immediate Release July 20, 2006

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State parks to be protected under new law

LANSING – Michigan's state parks now have more protection from being sold under legislation signed into law today, said sponsors Sens. Cameron S. Brown and Patty Birkholz.

"This is great news for all Michigan residents and out-of-state visitors who enjoy our state parks for the natural beauty and wildlife they offer," said Birkholz, R-Saugatuck Township. "Today we are telling everyone that we will continue protecting our natural resources so they will be around for many generations to enjoy."

The new laws establish an extensive four-tiered process of review before any sale of state park or wilderness area could be approved. They also prohibit the transfer or sale of state park land without the approval of the Natural Resources Commission, recommendation from the Citizens Committee for Michigan State Parks and notice and approval by the Legislature of a proposed sale.

Further, the DNR would be prohibited from designating as surplus-land any property within a state park or state recreation area.

"The environment is a top priority to all Michigan residents," Brown said. "We must all be good stewards of the earth and work to protect our natural resources. These new laws will help ensure that Michigan's natural beauty remains for all to appreciate."

In October 2005, the Mackinac Center for Public Policy published a document titled "Privatization in Michigan State Parks," which suggested that selling a number of state parks could generate revenue for the state. The paper listed 13 state parks and one state recreation area "that may be good candidates for private ownership." While the DNR has indicated they have no plans to sell any state parks, the Mackinac Center proposal raised concerns about a lack of legislative and public oversight.